



Sound On Sound : Est. 1985

[Search](#) [News](#) [Articles](#) [Forum](#) [Video](#) [Subscribe](#) [Shop](#) [Readers' Adverts](#) [Information](#) [WebExtras](#)

**SOS Readers Ads  
GRAB A BARGAIN  
£351,905**  
of Second-User Gear for sale  
now — don't miss out!

## Warm Audio WA12

Microphone Preamplifier

Reviews : Preamp

Published in SOS February 2013

[Printer-friendly version](#)



**Warm Audio are a relatively new Texas-based company who have set out to produce a world-class preamp for rather less than a world-class price.**

*Matt Houghton*

They've based their debut product, the WA12, on the popular old API 312 preamp design — in fact, they feel that it's close enough to the original that on their web site they're able to call it a 312 'clone'. As with others who've produced 312-inspired preamps (BAE and Classic API, for example), it's not 100 percent accurate if assessed as a clone, simply because many of the original parts — the op-amps and transformers used in the original 312 design — are no longer available. However, Warm have employed suitable high-quality replacements, including custom-wound Cinemag input and output balancing transformers, which are similar to those used in many more expensive products.

Warm Audio's Bryce Young says that he used to charge \$1650 for two channels of this circuit, but that with the WA12 he aimed to disprove the "glass ceiling theory that one must spend \$1000+ to get a world-class preamp." Where once there may have been such a ceiling, I'm not so sure there is one today, because I could name quite a few good preamps that are available for less than that figure. An obvious point of comparison would be the Golden Age Project Pre73 (a Neve 1073 preamp clone), the basic version of which is slightly cheaper here in the UK — but by the time you've gone for the Carnhill transformer option on that, the prices are broadly similar. The two classic designs offer rather different sounds, though, and there are few preamps in this price range that can offer the same 71dB of gain as the WA12.

The WA12 has most of the features you'd hope to find: there's a high-impedance (2M $\Omega$ ) instrument input on the front panel, a polarity-invert button (which, commendably, has not been incorrectly labelled 'phase!') and 48V phantom power, which is switchable from the front panel. The gain control is stepped, which aids recall of settings, but to keep costs down this is actually a variable pot, rather than switched resistors. There's also an intriguing 'Tone' button, which, it turns out, switches the input impedance between 600 $\Omega$  and 150 $\Omega$ . Using that button also results in a slight level change, which makes direct comparison between the two settings tricky, but in my tests there was certainly a perceptible tonal change when it was used with a Shure SM57 (dynamic mics, including passive ribbon models, seem to be much more sensitive to changes in impedance than condenser and other active designs).

The price/performance ratio of the WA12, then, is impressive and although the price is reflected in some of the build details — the no-frills metal enclosure, and the external in-line AC power supply, for example — I could detect no compromise in the areas that count. The components used in the signal path are all of high quality, and the expertise that has gone into developing and laying out the circuitry is evident: there's no sign of any corners having been cut here. Despite my comments on the enclosure, I have to admit that it's solidly constructed, and that the bright (garish?) orange and black paint job is of decent quality.

When used for modest amounts of gain, the difference in sound between preamps is always small in relation to the rest of the signal chain, but there is a difference, and to my ears the WA12 strays further from the norm than most preamps do. I'd describe the sound of this preamp as solid, thick and rich, with a tightness at the bottom end combined with a gentle softening of higher frequencies, resulting in an identifiably 'vintage' sound. It has a particularly pleasing effect on electric bass and guitars, but its applications are certainly not limited to those instruments. It's certainly not the most transparent-sounding preamp, but that's really not Warm Audio's aim here — and if that is what you want, the world is awash with devices that offer bags of clean gain!

### Neve 1073LB & 1073LB EQ

500-series Microphone Preamplifier & Equaliser



Neve's venerable 1073 preamp and equaliser are both now available in API's popular 'Lunchbox' format. Were they worth waiting for?

### Cloud Microphones Cloudlifter

In-line Microphone Preamplifiers



Do these in-line mic preamplifiers mean you can use a passive ribbon mic with any preamp?

### Slate Pro Audio Fox | Media

Dual-channel Microphone Preamplifier



Test plots to accompany the article.

### Cloud Microphones Cloudlifter

Audio Examples

Audio files to accompany the article.

### Slate Pro Audio Fox Dual-channel Microphone Preamplifier



With two channels and four 'flavours' on offer, Slate's mic preamp promises plenty of flexibility.

Does it also deliver on quality?

### Neve 4081

Four-channel Microphone Preamplifier



Neve believe that there's scope to bring classic designs up to date — and that's exactly what they've done here, taking their revered 1081 mic preamplifier as the starting point.

### Radial Tonebone PZ Pre

Acoustic Instrument Preamp



James Dunkley is on the case of the Radial Tonebone PZ Preamp.

### Drawmer HQ Preamplifier & D-A Converter



Can a preamp and D-A converter successfully straddle the pro-audio and hi-fi markets? Drawmer believe it can...

### Studio Projects VTB1

Microphone Preamplifier



This hybrid mic preamp can go from solid-state clean to valve warmth — and for a surprisingly low price, too. Is

I often like to try pushing a preamp by feeding loud signals into it, particularly with transient-rich material such as drums, where the brief peaks overload the analogue circuitry, because more of the device's character becomes apparent, due in large part (I suspect) to the sonic contribution of the balancing transformers. The WA12 behaves rather nicely in this respect, and the -20dB pad allows you to feed in line as well as mic signals. As with the original API design, there's no built-in output attenuation, which means that this sort of 'driving' job is only really achievable if you follow the preamp with an external attenuation stage, whether that be a dedicated attenuator or another processor. It's a shame, in a way, as it should be easy and cheap to incorporate such a stage in a design like this without compromising the purity of the original design, and it would make the WA12 more versatile. The only other thing I missed was a high-pass filter, to cut out unwanted knocks, pops and rumbles. That said, it seems rather uncharitable of me to grouch about things as small as this, given the price and quality of what's on offer.

While testing the WA12, I had access to a couple of broadly similar-sounding preamps — an API 512c and a Classic API (Classic Audio Products, Illinois, not to be confused with API themselves!) VP28, both of which are available only in 500-series format, and the WA12 can hold its head high in this company. The latter of these two, in particular, offers a few more options, notably the output level attenuator, but it's not available stand-alone, and although the price is low, it's a DIY build! If you're in need of a stand-alone external preamp, then, and want it to add a little coloration to your signals, I'm happy to recommend that you consider the WA12.

£ \$449.

www.warmaudio.com

Published in SOS February 2013

there a catch?

### Dave Hill Designs Europa 1

#### Microphone Preamp



This novel preamp design features a variable impedance and slew rate — which opens up a whole new world of possibilities from your mic locker...

### MC AudioLab TP1tp Valve Microphone Preamp



Can Sicilian manufacturers MC AudioLab bring a touch of Mediterranean magic to your recordings with their new boutique preamp?

### Manley MicMAID Mic & Preamp Switcher



The patchbay remains the cornerstone of most commercial studios, but using one to patch mics into different preamps can be risky — which is where the MicMAID comes in...

### T-Rex SpinDoctor Valve Preamplifier



Is a high-quality valve preamp in a programmable pedal just what the SpinDoctor

ordered?

### BAE 1073 MPF Dual Solid-state Preamp



There are now several Neve 1073-inspired preamps available — but they're not always 100 percent faithful to the original design. How close does this new contender from BAE come?

### Focusrite Octopre MkII & MkII

#### Dynamic Eight-channel Microphone Preamps



With upgraded mic amps and A-D conversion in their MkII versions, do Focusrite's latest eight-channel preamps still lead the way at this price point?

### Empirical Labs EL9 Mike-E

#### Microphone Preamplifier & Compressor



Empirical Labs, purveyors of some of the most versatile compressors around, apply their dynamics expertise to a mic preamp.

### Benchmark MPA1 Dual-channel Microphone Preamplifier



Benchmark strive to make their products exactly that: something against which the competition should be judged. So how does their new preamp measure up?

### AEA RPQ Dual-channel Microphone Preamplifier



AEA have tweaked the design of their TRP ribbon-mic preamp, already something of a favourite, to create a device that's much more versatile — and without compromising on quality.

### A-Designs Pacifica Two-channel Microphone Preamplifier



Striking a useful balance between the transparent and the characterful, this high-quality, US-made preamp design brings versatility to the studio and some colour to the rack...

### PreSonus DigiMax D8

#### Eight-channel Mic Pre & A-D Converter



PreSonus combine their respected analogue and digital technology in this affordable ADAT-equipped preamp.

### SPL Rackpack Modular Preamp & Processor System



Sound Performance Lab have developed an enviable reputation for their hardware products, and now you can buy more for less with their modular rack system.

### Audient Mico Dual Microphone Preamplifier



With two channels of mic preamp, a phase-alignment control, digital outputs and clean signal path, the Mico offers you an awful lot of Audient for the money.

### Universal Audio Twin-finity 710 Hybrid Microphone Preamplifier



Which is best, tube or solid state? When it comes to investing in a preamp, that's a question you may no longer need to ask...

### Golden Age Project Pre 73

#### Microphone Preamplifier



This highly affordable device is based on the circuitry used in Neve's legendary 1073. So can you really get a classic vintage preamp sound on a budget?

### Arsenal Audio R20 & R24

#### Microphone Preamplifier & EQ



This new brand by revered high-end equipment manufacturers API is much more affordable than their established lines. So there must be a catch, right?

### Grace Design M201 Microphone Preamplifier

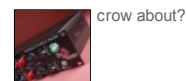


Regular readers will know that our Technical Editor isn't prone to excessive use of hyperbole — so when he calls a product "awesome", "stunning" and "sublime", it's probably time to sit up and take notice...

### Thermionic Culture Rooster

#### Valve Microphone Preamp & EQ

Is this latest addition to the Thermionic Culture flock something for the company to



crow about?

### Focusrite ISA One Mic Preamp

The ISA preamp range has graced professional recording facilities the world over — but this classy single-channel model is within reach of the home and project studio.

### Synchronia Sound Skulptor DIY Mic Preamp System

The DIY approach to audio equipment needn't mean bargain basement, and if you apply this principle to high-end vintage gear it might just save you a small fortune — without compromising on quality.

### Sebatron VMP 2000eVU Valve Mic Preamp

Australian company Sebatron aim to start building their brand in the UK with this 'character' preamp.

GLOSSARY: technical terms explained

#### WIN Great Prizes in SOS Competitions!

- ▶ Win Free Mastering at Abbey Road
- ▶ Win Softube Console 1 and plug-ins
- ▶ Win Blue Bottle Rocket Mic Locker

[▲ top](#)

[Home](#) | [Search](#) | [News](#) | [Current Issue](#) | [Tablet Mag](#) | [Articles](#) | [Forum](#) | [Blog](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Shop](#) | [Readers Ads](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Information](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Support](#) | [Login Help](#)

## SOUND ON SOUND

Email: Contact SOS  
Telephone: +44 (0)1954 789888  
Fax: +44 (0)1954 789895

Registered Office: Media House, Trafalgar Way, Bar Hill, Cambridge, CB23 8SQ, United Kingdom.

Sound On Sound Ltd is registered in England and Wales. Company number: 3015516 VAT number: GB 638 5307 26



### Current Magazine

Web Edition  
Tablet Mag app  
Buy PDF articles  
Magazine Feedback

### Subscribe

Subscribe Now  
Web Subscription FAQs

### Podcasts

### Competitions

### Home

### SOS Shop

### News

### Search

New Search  
Forum Search  
Search Tips

### Articles

Reviews  
Technique  
Sound Advice  
People  
Glossary

### Help + Support

### Forum

Today's Hot Topics  
Forum Channel List  
Forum Search  
My Forum Home  
My Forum Settings  
My Private Messages  
Forum Rules & Etiquette

### Video

Watch exhibition videos, tutorials, interviews, masterclasses

### Readers Classifieds

Submit New Adverts  
View My Adverts

### My SOS

Change Password  
Change My Email  
Change My Address  
My Subscription  
My eNewsletters  
My Downloads

### Information

Advertising  
Magazine On-sale Dates  
About SOS  
Contact SOS Staff  
Controlled Circulation  
Licensing Enquiries  
SOS Logos & Graphics  
SOS Site Analytics  
Privacy Policy

We accept the following payment methods in our web Shop:



All contents copyright © SOS Publications Group and/or its licensors, 1985-2016. All rights reserved.

The contents of this article are subject to worldwide copyright protection and reproduction in whole or part, whether mechanical or electronic, is expressly forbidden without the prior written consent of the Publishers. Great care has been taken to ensure accuracy in the preparation of this article but neither Sound On Sound Limited nor the publishers can be held responsible for its contents. The views expressed are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the publishers.

Web site designed & maintained by PB Associates | SOS | Relative Media